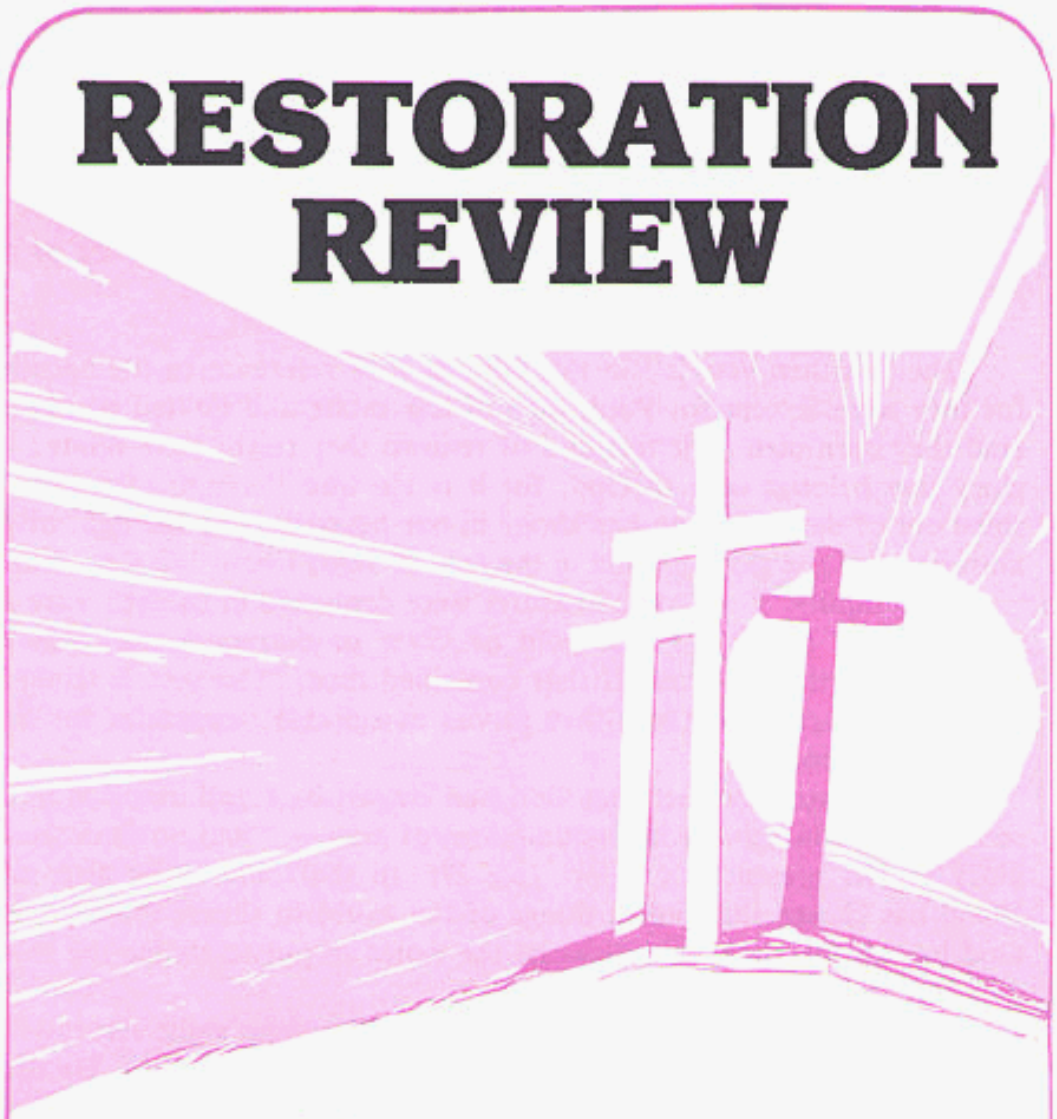
RESTORATION REVIEW



C. S. Lewis on What Will Unite Us

Disputations do more to aggravate schisms than to heal them: common action, united prayer, united courage and even (if God so will) united deaths — these will make us one.

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Volume 29, No. 4 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **April 1987**

The Sense of Scripture: Studies in Interpretation . . .

ARE THERE ERRORS IN THE BIBLE?

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. -2 Cor. 4:7

The "earthen vessels" in this context is in reference to the apostles, for they were, except for Paul, men of low estate and limited education. Had they been men of letters and of renown they might have diluted the glory that belongs only to God, for it is He who "commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

In antiquity, if not still, treasures were deposited in earthen ware for safe keeping. But it was the gold or silver or diamonds that was the treasure, not the rude vessels that contained them. The vessels might be marred or cracked, but still they served as suitable receptacles for their precious contents.

Paul stressed the fact that God had chosen base and despised things so as to put down the proud assumptions of man - "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:28-29). In that context he also says: "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty."

And so God chose the humblest of people, the nomadic Hebrews, to be "the apple of my eye," and not the Egyptians or the Greeks. He chose the lowly hill country of Judea for their home, and not the magnificent plateaus of Europe. He chose a peasant girl to give birth to Christ, and not a Roman princess. Jesus was born in a stable among brute beasts, and not in a palace among royalty. The Christian message was eventually deposited in Koine Greek, the simple language of the masses, and not in the language of Plato or Euripides. God was always choosing humble things so as to expose the folly of proud things. He did not even want the gospel proclaimed in the wisdom of words "lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect" (1 Cor. 1:17)

It is understandable, therefore, that Paul would see even himself, as well as all the apostles, as lowly earthen vessels, and so he could write the likes of: "I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). He went so far as to say: "We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now" (1 Cor. 4:13).

It appears inappropriate to ask if these apostles as earthen vessels in the hand of God were "without error" in what they said and did. As they proclaimed the good news would their grammar be exact and their syntax flawless? Would the facts of their testimony be correct in every detail and would they never contradict each other in what they reported, not even in the minutest items? Would every event referred to, every Scripture quoted, every date given, every name named be exactly right? Would such perfection be necessary for the purpose for which God called them?

On the very face of it we are compelled to concede that their ministry must have been as imperfect as they were as human beings. It is human to err, and every human endeavor, yea, everything that is touched by human hands is less than perfect. Even when we believe the apostles to be inspired or moved by the Holy Spirit, which the Bible teaches, we do not necessarily have to see them as flawless and inerrant. Inspiration may only mean that God "breathed" upon the apostles in such a way that they were led to say what he wanted said, at least in terms of *the message* that God wanted the world to hear, but in a way that allowed for each apostle's individual differences, peculiarities, and prejudices.

To claim inerrancy for the apostles and for the documents they eventually produced is an odd claim, one that they never made for themselves or for the Scriptures, whether the Old Testament, which was the Bible they knew, or for their own writings. The Bible makes no claim for either infallibility or inerrancy. It rather claims to be a "Thus saith the Lord" in sundry ways and diverse manners, and that through earthen vessels.

One can believe that a prophet like Jeremiah was moved by the Spirit and that his overall message is the word of God and yet believe that he was wrong in his thinking when he accused God of deceiving him (or lying), as he does in Jer. 4:10. And one can believe that Matthew was an inspired apostle and yet err in quoting from the Old Testament, as he did when he attributed to Jeremiah what was actually in Zechariah (Mt. 27:9). Matthew was quoting from memory, and, being the earthen vessel that he was, he attributed to one prophet what was said by another. An error like that does not matter unless one claims for the Bible what it does not claim for itself, *absolutely no errors.*

A more serious question about Matthew is the way he uses the Old Testament. In the lines that he took from Zech. 11:10-14 (and attributed to Jeremiah) the prophet is telling how he flung an unworthy reward he had received to the potter. Since the reward was thirty pieces of silver, Matthew feels free to apply this to the betrayal of Judas, though there is nothing in Zechariah to suggest that it is prophetic in any way. But Matthew often did this kind of thing, such as applying "Out of Egypt I called My Son" (Mt. 1:15), which

he took from Hos. 11:1, which clearly refers *backward* to the time that God delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage and not *forward* to the instance of the child Jesus being brought back from Egypt at the death of Herod, as Matthew uses it.

It was important to Matthew, writing as he was to Jews, to find prophecies in the Jewish Scriptures that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is easy to conclude that he overdid it, but he was an apostle, an eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ, and the fact that he chose to use this method made it right for him. But the rule should be: *don't use the Old Testament like that unless you are an apostle!* Perhaps no one but Matthew would have thought of applying Jer. 31:15, "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel is weeping for her children," to the slaughter of the innocent children in Bethlehem in the time of Christ, as he does in Mt. 2:18. Matthew takes a passage of hope and finds its fulfillment in a tragic scene of doom. In Jeremiah, God is telling the prophet that Rachel, the ancestress of all Israel, is weeping from her grave, which by tradition was in Ramah, and she weeps because her children have been taken away into captivity. But God tells her to stop weeping, for her children will be brought back from their captivity. *There is hope!*, God says to the weeping Rachel in her grave.

Matthew picks up on the weeping Rachel and says it is fulfilled in the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem, and he makes no use of the hope in the passage. But Jeremiah says it applies to the return of God's people from Babylon, and so Rachel need not weep. This need not be thought of as an "error," but we should see that such things are a problem to those who seek to interpret the Scriptures responsibly. But again, Matthew was an apostle, and if he was led by the Spirit to make such figurative or poetic use of Scripture, he had that right. But you or I should not use Scripture in such a disjointed way.

It is risky to speak of the Bible as having errors, for this is taken to mean that it must therefore be unreliable and untrustworthy. And it rallies the troops against you, for there are those who will rise in "defense of the word of God," and you will be called bad names like *liberal* or *modernist* and accused of not believing the Bible. And there is the inevitable question, "If there are errors in the Bible how can you distinguish between what is error and what is truth?" And so one who really loves the Bible and believes in its integrity, and yet wants to be honest in his study of it, is looked upon as an enemy of the Bible if he does not subscribe to a modern theory of inerrant, plenary, and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. I call it *modern* because it is nowhere implied in Scripture, was not believed by the early church, and is found in none of the ancient creeds of the church. It was born of modern Fundamentalism.

Alexander Campbell himself, who lived before most of the findings of modern Biblical criticism, wrote as follows when he was reviewing an article that insisted upon plenary and verbal inspiration:

> There is one assertion in the following remarks from which we must dissent - "that the scriptures claim for every jot and tittle of themselves the same plenary and verbal inspiration." This we regard as ultraism. Mr. Cone can, in our judgment, adduce no proof of any such claim; and could it be substantiated, would greatly impair the reasonings of the most able defenders of the inspiration of the Bible. It would be a great reproach upon the four Evangelists to represent them as believing every jot and tittle of the words of the Messiah and of themselves to have been inspired, when not any two of them narrate the same parable, conversation, sermon, or aphorism in the same words. The ideas and leading terms that represent them may be so regarded, but not every jot and tittle. - *Mill Harb.*, 1837, p.397

Since Campbell held that the ideas were inspired but not necessarily every word, one might ask him how he would differentiate between what is verbally inspired and what is not. He would probably say that common sense determines it. Take, for example, the words that Pilate had inscribed on the Cross, concerning which he said when asked to change the wording, "What I have written I have written." But what did he write? All four evangelists reported what he wrote, as follows:

> This Is Jesus The King Of The Jews. (Mt. 27:37)
> The King Of The Jews. (Mk. 15:27)
> This Is The King Of The Jews. (Lk. 23:38)
> Jesus Of Nazareth, King Of The Jews. (Jn. 17:19)

If one holds that inspiration means a plenary (full), verbal (word for word) communication from the Holy Spirit, he has some explaining to do in instances like this, and there are many of them. Common sense tells us that Pilate did not write all four of these statements on the Cross. So, if the Fundamentalists are right, three of these statements are erroneous. Here we have three "errors" in the Bible, for surely the Holy Spirit did not dictate what Pilate wrote in a different way to each of the four evangelists.

Not being one who holds the verbal-plenary-inerrant theory, I have no problem at all with such discrepancies, and yet I believe that "All scripture is inspired of God," as 2 Tim. 3:16 says. It does not say that all Scripture is *revealed* by God, for clearly much of the

Bible is drawn from personal knowledge and other documents, as Lk. 1:1A indicates. The Spirit inspired Luke, we can believe, but it did not reveal to him what he finally put in writing.

So, in the case of what was written on the Cross, I can see each writer relying on his memory, or drawing from a source before him, and so what they wrote was the gist of what Pilate wrote, and so they differ in precision. So, there is no error unless we try to make the Bible into a book of magic, untouched by man's fallibility.

Or take the case of the centurion who wanted Jesus to come to his home and heal his paralyzed servant boy:

> Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented. And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." (Mt. 8:5-7)

> A certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal the servant. (Lk. 7:2-3)

Only two of the evangelists tell of this incident, and while they generally agree on the story, they differ as to who it was that made the request to Jesus. Matthew says it was the centurion himself who came to Jesus, while Luke says he sent elders to make the request. Which is right? Is this an error? It is obviously no big deal, for it does not really matter which way it was. But if the Bible has to be exactly right "every word inspired" - then in cases like this one has a problem that could disturb his faith, but only because he feels obligated to defend a mechanical view of inspiration. I would guess, based on what we know about the ancient world, that Luke has it right, for it would be more likely that the centurion would have sent elders to Jesus with such a request than to go himself. This is supported by further conversation that Luke records as having transpired between the elders and Jesus, the elders saying things about the centurion that he would not have said about himself. If so, Matthew is wrong - on an unimportant detail!

Now you try one. Which of these do you think is right?

> Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? (Mk. 6:3)

> Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? and His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? (Mt. *13:55)*

This is all we know about Jesus being a carpenter, or was he? One says he was a carpenter, the other a carpenter's son. He could of course have been both and probably was, but what did the people in Nazareth really say about Jesus? Did they call him a carpenter or a carpenter's son?

If you conclude that Mark is right, I would agree, for it is likely, as most scholars agree, that Mark wrote first and that Matthew was drawing upon Mark for his information, along with an unknown document named Q. As we have noted, Matthew was writing to Jews and wanted to put Jesus in the best light possible. Since a carpenter was a nobody in the ancient world, Matthew softens the description with "son of a carpenter."

Whatever we make "moved by the Holy Spirit" mean in terms of inspiration, we must allow for differences like this one. Why did they not both say that Jesus was a carpenter? It appears that Matthew did not want his readers to know that Jesus was a carpenter. Mark was bolder with the truth.

Matthew frequently softens Mark's language. While Mark says that Jesus "*could do no* mighty work" in Nazareth (Mk. *6:5),* Matthew says he "*did not do* many mighty works" (Mt. *13:58).* He is more protective of the apostles than Mark, who represents them as having closed minds, and even "They had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened" (Mk. *6:52).* While Matthew relates the same incident, he leaves that out. And while Mark names two of the apostles, James and John, as requesting to sit next to Jesus in the kingdom, which caused friction among the apostles, Matthew softens the blow by saying it was their mother that made the request (Mk. 10:35, Mt. 20:20).

Luke also sometimes tempers Mark's language. When Mark tells of the woman who was healed when she touched the hem of Jesus' garment, he says, "She had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse" (Mk. 5:26). Luke tells the same story, but he omits the negative remarks about doctors. Was it because he was himself a doctor? At least he saw that he could tell that wonderful story of healing without excoriating doctors and without sacrificing any truth.

Some variations appear to be more problematic. When Jesus sent out the twelve, "He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff," according to Mk. 6:8, but in both Mt. 10:10 and Lk. 9:3, which describes the same event, a staff is forbidden. In John (2:13) Jesus cleanses the temple at the beginning of his ministry, while in Matthew, Mark, and Luke it comes near the end of his ministry. In 1 Cor. 14:22 Paul says that tongues are a sign for unbelievers while prophesying is for believers, but the context strongly suggests that he meant the opposite, that tongues are for believers and prophesying for unbelievers. You will note that J. B. Phillips makes this change in his translation, and explains in a

footnote: "This is the sole instance of the translator's departing from the accepted text. He felt bound to conclude, from the sense of the next three verses, that we have here either a slip of the pen on the part of Paul, or, more probably, a copyist's error.

It is of course possible to offer some explanation for these conflicts. Phillips is right that some of them may be a copyist's error, but it is irrelevant to argue for error-free autographs (the original apostolic writings) since they no longer exist. Some try to explain the variant chronology of the cleansing of the temple by insisting that Jesus cleansed the temple twice, at both the beginning and the end of his ministry, which would have him doing and saying the same thing each time. Moreover, Matthew-Mark-Luke treat the event as so momentous, even as a prelude to the crucifixion, that it is highly unlikely that Jesus had done the same thing before without any of the three recording it.

My view of the inspiration of Scripture is such that I see no need to use all kinds of gymnastics to explain the jars and conflicts. What inspiration means is that in the Bible we have the story and the message that God wants us to have, *in earthen vessels.* Since it is the work of men, however inspired, and not angels from heaven, we can expect some static in the transmission. But that enhances rather than degrades the message that comes through, for it shows there was no conspiracy to deceive us. If they were out to do "a job" on us and sell us a bill of goods, they would have made it tight and neat and flawless - like the Fundamentalists suppose it is anyhow!

As for the cleansing of the temple, why not simply say that John was more interested in truth than he was in chronology. He wanted to tell the great story of Jesus making a whip and asserting his authority as the Messiah, which is why he wrote, and so he told it early on, more concerned that it happened than when it happened. As for the "staff"-"no-staff" conflict, what is lost by conceding that there is an error along the way somewhere, but that it doesn't matter, for the point of Jesus' instruction remains the same, his envoys must be detached from the world.

Those who are pushy about the verbal-plenary-inerrancy theory do the church a disservice in that they lead sincere students of the Bible to believe that if there are any errors in the documents the whole thing goes down the tube. They are made to believe that their faith rests upon an inerrant Bible, even when the Bible makes no claim to be inerrant. And so, if they are *honest* with the Bible, they are soon in trouble, for there are textual problems. Such theorists overlook the fact that there were faithful Christians for hundreds of years before there was a Bible such as we have, errant or inerrant. Their faith was anchored in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and not in a Book, however great that Book eventually came to be.

Suppose we allow these theorists to have their way and assume that we can't believe if there are errors in the testimony. Take the resurrection of our Lord, which is the very heart of the Christian faith. Are there flaws in the testimony? Consider these facts from the record: (1) Mk. 16:2 says the women came to the tomb "very early in the morning when the sun had risen," while Jn. 20:1 says "while it was still dark." (2) Who spoke to these women at or in the tomb? Mt. 28:5 says "the angel," Mk. 16:5 says "a young man," Lk. 24:4 says "two men," and Jn. 20:12 says "two angels in white." (3) What did these women say when they left the tomb? Mk. 16:8 says "they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid"; Mt. 28:9 says "they went to tell his disciples;" Lk. 24:9 says "they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest."

If I have to harmonize this array of conflicting testimony before I can believe, I am in real trouble. What is precious about this testimony is that all four evangelists bear witness to the empty tomb. In spite of the jars and clashes in detail, they agree on what really matters. *He is risen!* I don't have to reconcile the differences in detail so long as there is agreement on the glorious fact that changed the history of the world. In a court of law witnesses do not have to agree on all the details in order for their testimony to yield an unquestionable verdict.

So, you have my answer to the question "Are there errors in the Bible?," and it is both yes and no. If by error one means that the Bible lies to us and cannot be trusted, then the answer is no, for the Bible does not have errors of that magnitude. If by error one means jars, conflicts, and contradictions then the answer is yes. But they are errors of no particular moment. In terms of the Bible's message to lost humanity, they do not matter.

What matters is that we be honest with ourselves and with the Bible, and not close our eyes to what is obvious. We are not to see only what we want to see. And it matters that we not make the Bible into an infallible paper pope, created by some kind of mechanical inspiration, and impose upon its claims that it does not make for itself and that it cannot measure up to. It is, after all, an *earthen* vessel, with the usual characteristics of things earthy.

It is the *treasure* in the vessel that matters, the basis of which is the Person it points to and exalts. The treasure in inerrant, not the vessel. In terms of revealing to us that treasured Person the Bible is safe, sure, dependable, authentic, and trustworthy. The occasional static only exalts "the Master's voice" all the more. It assures us that the mystery of the divine mingled with the human is real, and it embraces us in its mystery. — *the Editor*

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Highlights in Restoration History . . .

"PRAY MORE AND DISPUTE LESS"

The bitter, fratricidal conflict that we inappropriately call the Civil War came to an end at Appomattox Court House, Va. on April 9, 1865. When General Lee's last hopes were gone, he ordered a white flag to be raised and requested an interview with his opponent, General Grant of the Union army. The meeting between the two generals in a house in the tiny Virginia village is now part of American folklore.

Lee donned a new full-dress uniform and wore a jewel-studded sword, which he proffered to his conqueror, as military tradition dictated. Grant, carelessly attired in an unbuttoned private's blouse and without sword, was visibly shaken by the occasion. Saddened and depressed at the downfall of a foe he had long respected for both his skill and valor, Grant not only refused Lee's sword but made the surrender terms as lenient as he could. He paroled all Confederate officers and men. He allowed the officers to keep their side-arms, and then ordered "Let all the men who claim to own a horse or mule take the animals home with them to work their little farms." He believed that would help to reconcile a divided nation.

As Lee left the meeting, he looked out on a sea of Union soldiers, who looked like a field blossoming with stars and stripes. He paused for a moment and thrice he struck a fist into the palm of his gauntleted hand. Mounting his horse Traveller, he was soon gone. A sound of cheering spread across the Union lines. Grant ordered quiet as Lee rode away. "The war is over," he cried out to his men, "the rebels are our countrymen again."

What followed in the formal surrender is one of the dramatic scenes in American history. General Joshua Chamberlain, who received the surrender on behalf of Grant, later recorded an account of what transpired. He described the Confederates:

> Before us in proud humiliation stood the embodiment of manhood; men whom neither toils and sufferings, nor the fact of death, nor disaster, ,nor hopelessness could bend their resolve; standing before us now, thin, worn, and famished, but erect, and with eyes looking level into ours, waking memories that bound us together as no other bond; - was not such manhood to be welcomed back into a Union so tested and assured.

The general tells of the men in gray marching before the Union army, giving the soldier's salutation and the "order arms." The officer leading the column, with heavy spirit and downcast face, as Chamberlain described him, wheeled his horse superbly and saluted profoundly by dropping the point of his sword to the boot toe. The armies then passed before each other, honor answering honor.

General Chamberlain recalled how he was touched by the occasion:

> On our part not a sound of trumpet more, nor roll of drum; not a cheer, nor word nor whisper of vain-glorying, nor motion of man standing again at the order, but an awed stillness rather; and breathholding, as if it were the passing of the dead! . . . How could we help falling on our knees, all of us together, and praying God to pity and forgive us all!

God pity and forgive us all! If it is a fitting epitaph for a war that well-nigh destroyed a nation, it is an appropriate prayer for a divided church in a lost world. If it was tragic for citizens of the same nation to meet in mortal combat on a hundred battlefields, how much more tragic for brothers in Christ to destroy each other spiritually in the morass of theological disputation. As we realize the scandal of a divided church should we not also fall upon our knees and plead for God's forgiveness for what we have done to each other?

This was the sentiment of Barton W. Stone and his fellow Presbyterian ministers who became the Springfield Presbytery following the great revival at Cane Ridge in 1801. Now wanting to strip away any vestige of sectarianism, they created *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* by which they laid to rest the little ecclesiastical entity they had formed. In writing their will they began with an impressive term, *Imprimis*, which means "in the first place."

"Imprimis. We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large, for there is but one Body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling." So began one of the founding documents of the Churches of Christ-Christian Churches. In the first place, they insisted, sects should lose themselves in the one Body of Christ. But they went on.

"We will, that our name of distinction, with its *Reverend* title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name One." If a people choose to strip away all marks of sectarianism, then they will not wear a distinctive name, one that sets them apart from other believers.

The reforming Presbyterians went on in their will to say, "We will, that preachers and people, cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh."

It is noteworthy that we as a people began with a call for mutual forbearance, which is eminently scriptural. The fact that the apostle Paul urges, "With all humility and gentleness, with patience showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to

preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," is evidence that differences will exist between believers. In a closed society where conformity is demanded there is nothing to forbear. The need for forbearance implies a prevailing diversity with its tensions and conflicts. But unity is preserved by mutual forbearance, inspired by humility and gentleness. These are the ingredients of unity.

When our founding fathers urged that separated brethren "pray more and dispute less," they were within the tradition of Christ himself, who prayed for unity more than he disputed about differences. When his disciples were arguing among themselves, Jesus donned a towel and washed their feet, and when he was alone with the Father he prayed for the unity of his little flock. Once he had prayed for the oneness of his immediate followers, he also prayed: "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, are in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me" (Jn. l7:20-21).

Here we have both the means and end of unity. The means is a common identity with Christ as he is in union with the Father. If we are in Christ together, we are united. The end or purpose of unity is the winning of the world for God. A divided church cannot win a lost world. And both the means and end of unity are undergirded by prayer - the praying Christ. Can we believe that the prayer of Christ will forever go unanswered?

We have hardly been true to our great heritage, for through the years we have debated more and prayed less. We have often gathered in internecine conflict, but how often have we assembled to pray? We put on the whole armor of God only to fight each other. Only when we discover who the real enemy is will we debate each other less and pray to God more. How great it would be if all across this land and around this world those who profess to follow Jesus Christ could gather in his name and pray for the unity of all God's people as Christ himself did. Speeches would not be necessary and we could forget about any kind of program. We would gather quietly and pray together as Christ prayed - that the world might be *won* by a church that is *one* - and then leave quietly. Such gatherings would bring heaven and earth closer together than have all the councils, conclaves, and conferences combined.

Pray more and dispute less! What a great and glorious heritage we have, and endangered as it is.

More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore,
let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
(Tennyson)

— the Editor

He that prayeth best loveth best. -*Coleridge*

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PELL-MELL IN LITTLE ROCK

So much is happening in the lawsuit at the Sixth and Izard Church of Christ in Little Rock that it takes lots of legal-brief reading to keep up, which I try to do. After over two years of litigation the plaintiffs (members of the congregation) won a court decision to see the financial records of the church, which the defendents (elders) did not want them to see. The defendents took the court order to the church office, demanding to see the books, but were still denied access. Using a coat-hanger, they tried to get into the room where the records were kept. Still repulsed, they got the judge to issue a contempt of court citation.

In delivering the contempt citation one of the members and one of the elders got into a fight of sorts, "a scuffle" the papers called it as they pictorialized it on their front pages. The member apologized to the church the next Sunday for his part in the scuffle and asked for forgiveness, but the elder apparently did not. In the meantime the elders have announced their intention to appeal to the state supreme court rather than open up the financial records to the members, which will stay the ruling that they must open up the books.

The elders also told the church that they want to "unincorporate," for it was being a corporate body subject to state laws that got them into all this, and return to being a voluntary association. They incorporated in the first place to avoid any danger of being sued as individuals, for the church is in several businesses, including a parking lot and a child care operation. They've also handled large sums of money for missions, particularly to Poland. The facts are that the elders are not in all this trouble because they incorporated, but because they insist that the members have no right to see the financial records - when the money belongs to the members, not the elders!

The usual reaction to this all across the country is, "What are they trying to hide?" The litigation has had its humorous moments. When the judge who ruled in the case was asked by the plaintiffs to order the removal of a paper shredder from the church office, he refused to do so since he felt that was beyond his domain, but a local paper quoted the judge as saying, "What does a church need with a paper shredder?" If this case will cause some churches not to incorporate or to unincorporate, they are to be advised, contrary to what the Little Rock elders imply, that a voluntary association is as much obligated under law to open its books to its members as a corporate body.

It will hardly become an issue among Churches of Christ as to whether members have a right to know all financial matters of their congregation, for our churches have always acknowledged this and practiced it. The Little Rock elders must be the only instance not only in Church of Christ history but in the history of any denomination where officials of a church have spent years in litigation and appealed to a supreme court rather than allow its members to see how their own money has been spent. Our problem is usually of a different sort: apathy on the part of the members as to how the money is spent and an abandonment of any fiscal responsibility. Our people are often all too willing to allow their leaders to do their thinking for them and to spend their money for them, and no questions asked.

What is an issue among us, which the Little Rock story and other cases of litigation will help to point up, is the authority of elders. This is odd for a people who have always been captives of the word, for the Bible never speaks of elders in reference to their having authority. To the contrary, the Bible warns elders "not to lord it over those in your charge but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3), and their ministry is generally described in terms of servants and shepherds. So any "authority" would not be official but in terms of the exemplary lives elders are supposed to manifest. Decision-making should in some way involve all the members, not just the elders, and the failure to honor this democratic and biblical principle lies behind all these lawsuits. Elders are to be overseers and not over-rulers.

While the plaintiffs (members) in Little Rock are suspicious that the church's financial records will reveal wrongdoing, they have even a greater fear. One of them told me that he dreaded to learn what might well prove to be true, that beyond wanting to hide something in the books there may be the arrogance of an "eldership" that cannot be questioned by anybody about anything. This attitude of "Who are you to question an elder?" has become all too prevalent among us in recent years, which is hardly the spirit of the one who is the chief shepherd of us all. Even the pope has his curia with which he must deal, but many of our elders presume to be lords over the congregation and responsible to no one.

The preachers are partly responsible for this as they forever refer to members placing themselves "under the authority of the elders." I thought our Lord Jesus Christ had all the authority, and if it's a matter of Christians submitting to anyone else, then we are to "submit yourselves one to another," which would of course include the elders, as Eph. 5:21 instructs us, but only then, as that verse indicated, *out of reverence for Christ*, who is our only lord and master, and so our only authority. But our preachers do not say much about our submission to each other out of reverence for Christ, but only to the elders as if they are authoritarian figures after the order of corporate executives, never to be doubted and never to be questioned. And yet our Lord could not have been plainer when he said "It shall not be so among you," when this kind of authority was in question, as Lk. 22:25-26 indicates.

So if the Sixth and Izard fiasco turns out to be more a matter of arrogance of power and raw egotistical pride ("How dare you to question what an elder does? We'll show you!") than misappropriation of funds, which is at least more understandable, then preachers and members alike are going to have to share the blame for such a tragedy. Preachers too often "butter up" the elders as power figures and many members act as if they are defying God himself if they question what an elder does. So if we have outdone the Roman Catholics in creating a hierarchy, we have only ourselves to blame. We were supposed to have learned long before Little Rock that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

If the Little Rock affair causes our folk to wake up and realize what is going on, it could be a blessing in disguise. At least one member of the Church of Christ in Little Rock aroused herself when she saw pictures in her local papers of her leaders scuffling at the door of the church. She wrote as follows to the *Arkansas Gazette*, which was published in full:

> As a member of the Church of Christ, I find it absolutely pathetic and degrading that people who claim to be Christians resort to childish antics such as scuffling and shoving like 2-year olds instead of coming together in prayer and love to resolve their problems.
>
> I refer to the front page of Section B in the March 12 issue of the *Arkansas Gazette* that depicts two church members of the Sixth and Izard Church of Christ congregation embroiled in a bitter dispute over church financial records. Actions like this go completely against the teachings of God's word, for in I Cor. 6:1-7 we are commanded not to go to the world in litigation against our brethren, but to settle the dispute among ourselves. Did any of

these people stop and think that their action and hatred not only destroyed the influence and credibility of the Church of Christ but made us the laughing-stock of both the religious and secular worlds?

It is a sad day when the world cannot tell us from its own, and when we act just as sinful as the drunken bum on the street corner.

I am and always will be proud of Christ's church, but I hang my head in shame and weep at deeds like this, which sully not only the name of the church but the name of Jesus as well.

I urge these people involved in this unseemly dispute to please settle this quietly, prayerfully and peacefully without bringing more shame and dishonor to the Church of Christ. - *Robin Hall Medley, North Little Rock.*

While we might take exception to our sister comparing a poor drunken bum, who may not be far from the kingdom, to the haughty behavior of church folk, we admire her for speaking out in righteous indignation. And I am impressed that she did not feel obligated to use the lower case *c* and simply use "Church of Christ," which is of course correct since she is referring to a recognizable church body or denomination. Our fastidious use of "church of Christ," which is supposed to mean that we are not a denomination (while all others are!) is as arrogant and puerile as it is bad English.

But she is not quite right about 1 Cor. 6, is she? Paul is not issuing a command about not going to law to settle a dispute, but is shaming the brethren for having to resort to such. If brethren try for years to secure their rights guaranteed them both in Scripture and in our Constitution all to no avail, they may have to call upon the powers that be, which is why God ordained them. If someone is trying to steal your property or abscond with funds and you feel that you cannot in this case "rather be defrauded" (1 Cor. 6 again), then you may have to appeal to law courts for protection. Unfortunately some people even in the church cannot be moved by either persuasion, pleading, or prayer.

But the likes of our sister in North Little Rock is an important part of the answer to our problem of arrogance of power. When our folk in the pew speak up and say *Enough is enough!* and accept the responsibilities that are theirs in Body life, then and only then will the needed changes come. — *the Editor.*

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A UNITY PRESENTATION
Roger Woodward

This is going to be a plea for openness, unity, and heart searching Bible study. I certainly have no desire to condemn, ridicule, or embarrass anyone. God forbid that either by word or tone of voice I should convey any impression of feeling superior to anyone. I have been asked to explain what I believe about the word of God, and this I am most glad to do. I have made a big and wonderful change in my understanding of this grand book we call the Bible

I've been in the mainline Church of Christ all my life. I've converted Catholics, Christian Church, Baptists, and Nazarenes to our fellowship. I've served as an elder and have taught many, many classes. So, I know Church of Christ teachings and thinking frontwards and backwards, and I have defended them all. About six years ago I began to really question division in the Church of Christ (of which there are about thirty). I also decided that, to be intellectually honest, I had to re-examine everything I believed.

I inherited an old religious library that included the Millennial Harbinger by Alexander Campbell, works of Barton W. Stone, and many others. The Restoration fathers were tolerant of all who named Jesus as Lord, and I only tolerated those who understood the New Testament as I did. The Restoration fathers moved among all denominations calling for unity. Not me; I had walled myself in and did not dare move among my friends in denominations. The Restoration fathers operated on love for acceptance, and I operated on conformity for acceptance.

I was shocked when I learned about Daniel Sommer and the Sand Creek, Illinois "Address and Declaration" on August 18, 1889 that served, more or less, as a formal withdrawal of fellowship and of calling anyone a brother who did not agree with them on choirs, missionary societies, instrumental music, etc. I've always argued that we were not Campbellites but, until I read this, I did not know that our group of the Church of Christ was Sommerites.

I read a new book entitled *I Just Want To Be A Christian,* and I thought, "Why can't we see simple Christianity alike?" Last year at the OCC Lectureship I picked up a book entitled *Re-Digging The Wells* and was given a copy of *ONE BODY,* a tabloid dedicated to unity. In October, 1985, I received a copy of *Free In Christ,* written by a retired preacher. These books opened up my thinking for a greater desire to have unity. This was followed in January, 1986 by the most scholarly study of the covenants I have ever read. It was titled *That The World May Believe.* This book was the key that made me see that I had misused the scriptures. Believe me, it's not easy to admit that you've been wrong and misunderstood the scriptures all of your life. As a result, though, I can now enjoy anyone who names Jesus, and I can tolerate and consider the thinking of others, even though I may not agree with their understanding.

How prevalent is this thinking? I can't speak for these men or say exactly what they believe, but I understand that Rubel Shelly, after study, changed overnight and Reuel Lemmons has been writing and proposing this thinking in Image Magazine for one and one-half years. Richard Rogers made the statement to me that I should disregard anything of his that is over three years old because he has changed completely his way of approaching the Word. I deceived my father to get him even to consider this because he was so prejudiced. He has been a Christian for sixty years and fought this way of thinking with all his vigor for months until he finally saw the simple truth I am about to share with you. I have never seen my father as excited about the Lord and His Word as I have in the last four months. His excitement is as though he had just found the Pearl of Great Price. Jesus is all he wants to talk about. I could go on with names too numerous to mention.

So, you ask, "How have you changed in your understanding of the Word?" First, we have to realize that the words *testament* and *covenant* are the same. When we say Old Testament or New Testament, we could just as easily say Old Covenant or New Covenant. The first thirty-nine books of the book we call the Bible are not the Old Testament; however, the Old Testament is recorded there. And the twenty-seven books we call the New Testament are not the New Testament; however, Luke recorded for us the giving of the New Testament thirty to forty years after it was given by God.

Let's look at what the Old Testament was. Deuteronomy 4:13 says it's the Ten Commandments written in stone. The old scriptures following the giving of the testament at Mount Sinai tell how God's people related to the testament. God said through Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31 f) he would change the testament.

The New Testament was not a written code; neither was it chiseled or printed. The New Testament was written on the heart (inward parts). The New Testament is not enshrined in a book, but within the spirit of man. The New Testament was complete when given on the day of Pentecost.

With the giving of the New Testament, or Covenant, Jesus did not confine us with another law. He did not build another fence. He did not provide another yoke of bondage. Instead, he set us free. He freed us, not only from the law given by Moses, but the law principle that was helpless because of the flesh.

The new scriptures, apostolic letters, were written years later. Many Christians lived and died and never saw what we call the New Testament. In fact, many never saw a Bible until the 15th Century when the printing press was invented. The twenty-seven letters are not the New Testament. They are the apostles' letters written to testament people on how to conduct themselves in relation to the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:3-6).

Here is a quotation from a religious historian, Dr. Leroy Garrett:

> Thank God that He did not give a book to save the world, but He gave himself in the form of a Person. That Person is the ground of our faith, the basis of our unity, and the source of our hope. There is a book, a glorious revelation, that tells us of that Person. But it is the wonderful Person of the Bible rather than the Bible itself that unites us. That Book is like a map or a telescope by which or through which we see the Christ. We tragically err when we lose Christ in the Book, allowing some set of 'faithful doctrines,' which are often only the opinions of some sect, to eclipse the very one the Bible was intended to reveal.

Because we use the letters of the apostles as letters of law like the testament of law, we are the authors of division. Robert Richardson wrote: "Many seem to have lost sight of the obvious distinction which is to be made between the Bible and the Gospel. It should never be forgotten that the Apostles and first preachers of the gospel had no Bibles, and not even a New Testament to distribute; and that there was no such thing among the early Christians as a formal union upon the 'Bible alone.' Nay, rather it was a union upon the 'gospel alone.' " (Millennial Harbinger, 1847, p. 508f)

I accept the Gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. My faith is in him alone. It's Jesus I praise, honor, love, and hold up as both Lord and Christ. He alone is my righteousness, for I have none of my own.

I do not plead that my brethren accept instrumental music, premillennialism, orphans homes, classes, cups, or colleges. I simply plead that they quit playing God and accept all of God's children as their brothers.

There is a revolution going on, a new awakening about unity in Christ, and I want to be a part of it. Brethren, we need a united church for a divided world. Speaking for myself, I want to be a *peace* maker, and not a *piece* maker; so I intend to devote the rest of my life to this godly task.

(This is a condensed version, prepared by Cecil Hook, of an extended presentation by Roger Woodward to his own congregation, the Garriott Rd Church of Christ in Enid, Ok., which eventually culminated in his separation from said church. Roger has a long and faithful history in the Church of Christ. If you want a free copy of the entire presentation, write to him at 1234 5. Hayes, Enid OK *73703 — Ed.)*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Gospel Tidings, presently edited by Jim Bullock, is to be edited by Travis Allen starting with the April 1987 issue and will emanate from Denver. This paper serves Churches of Christ of the non-Sunday School persuasion and has news items about these churches as well as many thoughtful articles by responsible writers. Its lead article in the March issue was on "The Church of Tomorrow: What Can We Do Today?" The sub rate is $6.00 per annum and the address is 301 Ramble Lane, Austin, TX 78745.

I attended the conference for more open Churches of Christ at the Bering Dr. church in Houston. This was the third of a continuing series, the first two being held by the Central Church of Christ in Irving, Texas. It was well attended and superbly conducted, providing an interesting and informative program on fellowship through service, including hospital and prison ministries, hospitality apartments, family counseling, worship renewal, and how to overcome the sectarian spirit. Lynn Mitchell, an elder in the Bering Dr. church and co-planner of the event, stated the spirit behind the conference: "Pride and exclusivism breed separation and division. Servanthood and childlike obedience bring people together."

I also attended the "Christians Only" conference for Disciples of Christ at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. They expected about 150 to attend but got 550, which within itself indicates that the Disciples have a vigorous interest in the meaning of their heritage as well as the direction for their future, which was the nature of the conference. They explored in both plenary sessions and discussion groups such issues as worship, ministry, congregational life and discipline, global mission, evangelism, church and social transformation, and authority. There were two of us there from Churches of Christ and a number from Christian Churches. I was impressed with the vigor and openness with which the questions were discussed. Blacks and women, including black women, were well represented on the program. Position papers of substance were issued by the study groups, concerning which we may have more to say.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

I have become so disillusioned with the legalism in the Church of Christ that I have come close to leaving. My husband would never leave, however, even though he agrees with me. I've decided not to leave because I don't want to upset my family. In your paper you also give some good reasons for staying. -*Name withheld*

(Many in the Church of Christ are where this sister is, staying but not liking it. The matter is not so simple as staying or leaving, but what one does (and the attitude one has) whether here or there. We must have a sense of mission and believe that we are where God wants us to serve him. It is not how we are treated but how we treat others, not whether we are loved but whether we love others. Jesus did not walk out but hung in, *serving* even when rejected, where he was, even unto death itself. His own church rejected him. The only real victory is in realizing that it is more blessed to give than to receive. -*Ed.*

If there is one thing we in the Church of Christ need to re-examine it is hermeneutics. What a mess we have made of it! I often hear, for example, that the "new covenant" is the "new law," which is the New Testament. Until we get rid of that kind of thinking we can never have unity. I met Cecil Rook at the ACU lectureship. Working through his books, *Restoration Review, Mission,* and a sermon here and there, this congregation is going to change. Some good things are happening. Thanks for doing your part. -*Name withheld*

I continue to benefit from your paper. It helped me to strip off a lot of the legalistic ideas I once had and let me move into grace through Jesus Christ. What a wonderful experience to have all that weight taken off my shoulders! May God bless your efforts to free others through Christ to throw off the concept of justification through law, works and right doctrine. Unity can come only through Christ, not by conformity to all the right doctrine. - *Warren and Susan Turney, LaGrange, IN*

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BOOK NOTES

In our celebration of the 200th anniversary of our Constitution we should read something special about our national heritage. I suggest *An American Dream* by John W. Whitehead, a book about the heart and soul of America and how the Dream can live again. $8.95 postpaid.

Though written a few years back out of concern for the "health, wealth, prosperity" gospel, *From the Pinnacle of the Temple* by Charles Farah of Oral Roberts University is a book that deserves to be continually mentioned. Amidst all the excesses in the church the

author calls for a balanced faith. His chapter of whether the church is larva or adult will encourage you. He presents such facts as the 350 million Christians are expected in Africa by the year 2000 and that Roman Catholics are issuing more free Bibles than all Protestants combined. $7.95 postpaid.

You will notice in Roger Woodward's article (this issue) that he referred to the impact that *That The World May Believe* has had on his life. This book, which is a study of the covenants and sets forth how we can unite upon the basics of the gospel, is by Carl Ketcherside, and the only book by him that is still available. While the supply lasts we are selling these for three for $5.00 postpaid. They are ideal to pass along to folk caught up in a legalistic faith.

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